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Alisha Warren is a Chemistry Pre-Pharmacy major with a minor in Biology from Elton, LA. After graduation in 2017, Warren plans to become a pharmacist and a role model to young children. In the future, she plans to pursue research in child development. Initially, this scholarly project was a research project for a class in Human Development.

The Ultimate Learning Experience

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Abstract

This essay was written as an assignment for Psychology 1012: Human Development after completing sixteen hours of service-learning. In this essay you will learn about the development of three different students that are in the same age range based on Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, Bandura's social cognitive learning theory, and Kohlberg's theory of moral development. These theories were applied to a group of children with an age between three and four at McMillan's First Steps Child Care Center. I chose this service-learning site because I was interested in the development and behavior of young children. This essay illustrates that all children that are in the same age range are not on the same level of development. The examples provided are actual events that occurred during my time spent at McMillan's; however the names of the people involved have been changed.

Key Terms:

- Individualism and Exchange
- Obedience and Punishment
- Scaffolding
- Theory of Cognitive Development
- Social Cognitive Theory

The mind is a beautiful thing to explore. There are so many things that one can learn from it. However, it is important to understand that all minds are not alike, therefore the development of people is different. This is especially important when researching the minds of children that are categorized as equally developed based on their age range. We must remain open minded and be willing to accept that earlier presumptions about child development are not always correct. This is what Psychology 1012: Human Development helped me understand. Before taking this class, I believed, like many others, that all children of the same age learned the same way. However, I was proven wrong through personal observations and the use of Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, Bandura's theory of social cognitive development, and Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development states that children can develop cognitively in their understanding of the world, and learn what is important in society through play and cooperation with others (Feldman, 2009). I applied Vygotsky's theory with a focus on the concept of scaffolding while interacting with Kenny, a 3-year old at McMillan's. Scaffolding is the support for learning and problem solving that encourages independence and growth (Puntambekar & Hübscher, 2005). Like most three year olds, Kenny does not know how to shoot a basketball. I assessed his ability by watching him miss the basket numerous times. This is when I decided to coach Kenny on how to make a basket. Every time he missed a basket I told him what he did wrong and to try again. After many times of correcting Kenny and instructing him on how to make the shot, he finally made one. After making the first basket, he continued to make shots.

Based on my experience with Kenny, I would say that my assistance or scaffolding worked in teaching him how to make a basket.

After working with him and teaching him how to shoot the basketball correctly he was able to make the shot. We were able to assess what was causing Kenny not to make the shot, and the problem was resolved.

The use of Vygotsky's theory of sociocultural development and its concept of scaffolding teaches the proper ways of teaching different concepts to a person. In order to successfully teach a 3-year old something, one must repeatedly teach him or her the same step over and over before he or she can move on to the next step. Once this has been done, the child will be able to complete the task on his or her own. As with Kenny, once his problem with making a shot was identified and corrected, he was able to act independently and make the basket on his own.

After grasping the proper ways of teaching children, I wanted to know what factors effect their learning. Bandura's social cognitive learning theory helps explain these factors. Bandura's theory is "states that a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing of human behavior will develop through observation" (Feldman, 2009, p. 16). In order for someone to effectively learn something, he or she must pay attention, retain the information, reproduce the information, and be motivated to reproduce the information (Feldman, 2009).

When I visited McMillan's, I taught the 3- and 4-year olds how to play the game Duck, Duck, Goose. First, I explained to them that they have to sit in a circle, and the person who is "it" goes around and taps each person's head saying "duck." When their head is tapped and the person that is "it" says "goose," they have to chase that person around the circle and try to tag the tapper before he or she gets back to the chosen goose's place. To help the children better understand the game, I demonstrated how the game is played. After my demonstration, I chose a girl named Mary-Ann

who is 3 years and 4 months old to start the game. Here is what I observed.

Mary-Ann illustrated Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory by paying attention, retaining the information, reproducing the information, and being motivated to reproduce the behavior. While I was explaining Duck, Duck, Goose, I noticed that Mary-Ann looked at me with understanding. When I chose her to start the game, she was able to take my instructions of the game and successfully demonstrated all the steps of the game. On the contrary to Mary-Ann, Billy was 3 years and 2 months old and did not follow learning according to Bandura's theory. When I first started explaining the game Billy gave me his full attention, but when I started explaining the chasing part of the game he lost focus. When it was finally his turn to be "it," he could not fully reproduce all the behaviors to complete the game according to the proscribed rules. After observing his behavior, I asked him to explain to me how the game was played. He explained the game up to right before the chasing part of the game, when you tag a person as "it." Since it was clear that he did not successfully learn how to play Duck, Duck, Goose, I pulled him off to the side and explained the game again. After the second explanation, Billy successfully demonstrated the proper ways of playing Duck, Duck, Goose. The lesson that can be taken from all four steps of Bandura's theory after applying them to the children at McMillan's is that it helps in assessing whether a child learns something. The ability to assess how much a child is learning can help a person become a better teacher to children and assist children in becoming better learners.

When it comes to being an effective learner one must know the difference between right and wrong. This is where Kohlberg's theory of moral development applies. Kohlberg's theory describes moral development at three levels: pre-conventional morality, conventional morality, and post-conventional morality (Feldman, 2009). Of the three levels of the development of moral

reasoning, pre-conventional morality is the most applicable to behavior observed at McMillan's. The two sub stages of pre-conventional moral development are obedience and punishment, and individualism and exchange (Feldman, 2009). The obedience and punishment stage says that children are more concerned about obeying the rules to avoid punishment. In the individualism and exchange stage, children focus more on individual points of view and judge actions based on how they serve individual needs (Feldman, 2009). I noticed the obedience and punishment stage in one of the students at McMillan's.

One day, Andy a 3-year old student in my class, wet his pants. He immediately reacted by crying, jumping up and down, and screaming "no!" I became curious about his behavior and wanted to know what caused his reaction. While I was cleaning him, he seemed to calm down a little, but it wasn't until one of my co-workers said she would wash his clothes before his mom came that he completely calmed himself. I asked Andy why he cried when he wet his pants. He responded by telling me that he would get in trouble with his mom if she found out. I asked Andy what kind of trouble he would get in and he said he would get spanked. Using Kohlberg's theory of moral development, I assessed Andy as being in the obedience and punishment sub stage of the pre-conventional level of moral development. He was trying to be obedient by not breaking his mother's rule about wetting his pants because he feared punishment. When Andy broke the rule, he became frantic about the punishment he would receive from his mother. Andy was motivated to behave correctly because of his desire to avoid punishment.

Kohlberg's theory helped me understand that children at the age of three are concerned about obeying the rules and the punishment they would receive if the rules are broken. At this age, children are being taught the differences between right and wrong. They are taught the appropriate and inappropriate ways of behaving. It is my

assumption that since the children I worked with were in the process of learning how to behave, they understood their punishment as a result of being a disappointment to their parents for their behavior. When a child is disciplined for misbehaving, he or she will do what it takes not to misbehave again for fear of punishment and the desire not to disappoint his or her parents. When a child goes to the bathroom on his or her own, he or she is rewarded by his or her parents with items such as ice cream and candy. On the other hand, when a child has an accident in his or her clothes her or she is punished, and is therefore not rewarded with ice cream or candy.

As demonstrated above, the children observed at McMillan's children acted in ways that supported Vygotsky's, Bandura's, and Kohlberg's theories. My observation suggested that in applying Vygotsky's theory, it is important to repeat information for a child to retain it and also to be patient while doing it. When applying Bandura's theory, one must realize that is necessary to show the four steps he says are required to be a successful learner. Finally, Kohlberg's theory shows how children determine what is morally correct and what is not.

For future teachers, students, and volunteers, the information presented here would be helpful when working with young children. The human development theories give a better understanding of why children behave as they do and the cause of that behavior. Awareness of the behavior and development of young children is important because it allows one to more easily detect problems that they may be having. The earlier these problems are detected the easier it is to secure a bigger and brighter future for these young children.

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